

The On-the-job Training (OJT) Program: Students' Future Careers and Personal Development

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Abstract: In Vietnam, some universities develop a similar program to a practicum or an internship called an on-the-job training (OJT) program. However, this concept appears to be quite new to students, and its impacts on students' learning and growth remain under-researched. The current study explores how OJT programs impact students' future careers and personal development. The study used mixed research methods and data obtained from 150 students' responses at a private university in Vietnam via a 34-item questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that OJT programs significantly influence students' future professional and personal development as well as personal capacities. Spending a whole semester in enterprises arouses students' interest in intending what jobs they will take after graduation since they form a clearer orientation for their future careers. Besides the strengths observed, choosing a variety of firms, organizations, and job training positions and responsibilities for students is considered the program developers' great concern. The findings of this study show that learning that incurs during the OJT or practicum may emerge from students' social interactions, communications, and observations of their peers, supervisors, and others. Learning, in this sense, is both personally and socially constructed.

Keywords: On-the-job (OJT), Social learning theory (SLT), Personal development, Professional development

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Introduction

After graduating from university, students enter a professional environment where they work as either permanent or temporary employees. This will be a challenging period for students as every job responsibility can be new to them. At many colleges and universities, students are required to attend an internship semester in order to integrate their theoretical knowledge and the skills learned from university into their jobs. At some universities in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, students participate in internship programs that usually start at the

end of their fourth year.

However, a private university in the region which the authors chose to be the research site employs a similar program called the on-the-job training (OJT) program. This kind of internship model begins in the 6th semester (out of 9 semesters) and lasts from 4 to 8 months. The standard duration is 4 months (one semester). In case some students continue their jobs at OJT after they have finished, they can choose to either defer the next academic semester (the 7th semester) or work and study at the same time. The primary principle of the OJT is to connect the university and students with businesses, assisting students to enhance their professional skills and personal development in the future. Students, educational institutions, and businesses are considered the three primary parties involved in this internship model. It is more likely that discrepancies among the three parties should never be ignored as they consider the benefits differently, and have different needs and expectations. The differences may cause apprehension about the standard of a successful internship program that can have great effects on students' professional skills and their personal development.

Further, research on practicums, internships, or OJT programs often concentrates on exploring the experiences of practicum program developers and administrators (e.g. Bernado et al., 2014; Ducan et al., 2011; Trianasari & Rahmawati, 2021), the effectiveness of evaluative frameworks (e.g. Billet et al., 2016; Wilt et al., 2019), and learning processes (e.g. Jackson, 2014; Nguyen & Thach, 2022). The body of extant research is solid, depicting various landscapes of the OJT management and students' learning experiences. However, most of these studies do not deal with the influences of OJT programs or practicums on students' choices of future careers. This gap is addressed in this paper. Further, within the context of the OJT programs deployed in Vietnam, this stream of research is limited. Within this limited body of research, Nguyen and Thach (2022) explored the authentic experiences of students taking OJT programs and confirmed that they can only have a sense of authentic experiences once they are able to make sense of their learning within their OJT programs. The authors of this paper continue to advance Nguyen and Thach's (2022) arguments. Instead of examining the authentic experiences of students like Nguyen and Thach (2022), we take the social learning theory that views students' learning processes as the outcomes of their engagement in the working environment with others in which they observe, imitate, and learn from these people.

Whilst numerous attempts have been made to investigate how internships affect students' future professional and personal development, only a few studies have explored this area on the OJT program in the Mekong Delta in general and in Vietnam in particular. Additionally, a terrible internship experience can change a person's conception of the internship and create a distance between them and businesses. Unexpectedly, internship programs are often reflected as unstructured and poorly organized so students generally complain about the quality (Jenkins, 2001). As these issues were addressed, this study aims to provide practical insights into this program. It points out the strengths and weaknesses of the OJT program as well as discusses the impacts of the program on students' professional skills and self-development. The results of this study are expected to help students realize their essential professional skills that need to be enhanced so that they can seek the most appropriate future job while universities have an opportunity to review and re-design their OJT program if

necessary. For such purposes, it is worth an investigation that is guided by the following questions.

- 1) To what extent does the OJT program influence students' future career and personal development?
- 2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the OJT program?

The nature of the OJT program

An OJT program is depicted as an educational module for undergraduates to approach actual working environments. Not only does it enhance students' academic knowledge and social skills for preparing for their future careers, but it also helps create an intimate connection between students and firms from the program (Alex, 2013). However, in many universities in Vietnam, not every single major develops such a program for its students to have this experience. In some institutions, it is often the case that just students of pedagogy are supposed to participate in the internship program which lasts about three months whilst students studying other fields of study are not required to do so. For students who would like to enhance their social skills in a real working environment, they have to seek an internship program organized by firms (Tovey, 2001). It means that not every student has a chance to take part in such a program created by their institution.

Anjum (2020) has proved that by integrating conceptual knowledge into the academic OJT model, students are able to simplify to apply their understanding of the concepts at the workplace. This type of practicum is sometimes structured, e.g. program developers plan the concepts and lessons that students or interns are supposed to study from their engagement in work. Some are non-structured by nature as universities expect students to learn from their experiences collected from real working environments that academic contents and lessons cannot always cover equally in class. The program as such brings students an opportunity to grasp professional training and save the business' observation and training costs by providing them with skilled workers' guidance. The OJT program, which is usually non-structured, is believed to create great contributions to improving students' principal skills, abilities in utilizing technology, and personal characteristics (Valdez et al., 2015). Additionally, as students perform tasks in real work settings, they will be able to realize and assess themselves after having made mistakes. In the same vein, they can reflect on their individual strengths and weaknesses to promote or realize their shortcomings (Felicen et al., 2014).

According to Ho et al. (2017), the OJT program is a relatively new name for an internship program commonly referred to as a specialized and compulsory OJT model that is carried out from 4 to 8 months at subsidiary companies or partners of FPT University. After finishing their 6th semester at the university, students are required to get involved in real working environments since they have prepared adequate knowledge and necessary skills along with a general view of their major. The ultimate objective of an OJT program is to allow students to learn from professionals and others. The chairman of the board of FPT University Le Truong Tung stated that in their point of view, studying only two-thirds of the curriculum is adequate for students to perform at businesses while the remaining semesters are upper-learning processes aiming to support students' exploration of their upcoming career paths (*Dan Tri Newspaper*, 2017). Therefore, it is worth mentioning that

the OJT program is more likely to contribute to bringing students great opportunities to approach authentic working environments. Nguyen and Thach (2022) also pointed out that students encounter authentic experiences in taking OJT programs through their learning that is embodied by their interactions with peers, supervisors, and friends. They experience and acknowledge learning as growing in terms of professional knowledge, social skills, and working attributes that are envisioned to be important for their future jobs. This type of learning emerges through their observation of role models, attempt to reproduce the correct professional and social behaviors that are recommended by higher supervisors, and reproduction of those sets of behavior. In this way, Ho et al. (2017) and Nguyen and Thach (2022) implicitly acknowledged the role of social learning that happens during the OJT program.

Social learning theory

Social learning theory (SLT) was approached since there is an interrelation in how students learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. Developed by Bandura (1977), SLT is defined as the process of perception based on the thought of changes in self-efficacy, expectation, and skills, and improved academic and personal development via participation in a practical environment. This theory builds on the concept that individuals learn through their communications with others in a social background. From others' behaviors, people can form, fix, and reproduce the behavior that is deemed as correct and standard through imitation and observation (Harinie et al., 2017). This theoretical perspective holds that people tend to form social bonds with the ones they think have appropriate behaviors through productive communication with them, though some bonds cause differentiation from other social groups and internal drifts within a community (Pritchett & Moeller, 2022). By imitating more experienced coworkers' performances regarding solving arising problems, trainees can learn how to deal with problems in the same direction. In the same vein, Bandura's theory asserted that imitation and modeling befall if an individual perceives a progressive result. Learning, as such, occurs in both formal and non-formal modes (Alam, 2022).

In the light of SLT, the program aims to create such chances for students to engage themselves in practical training so that they can develop their skills and absorb new knowledge needed for their future careers. Similarly, they can see how the theories or knowledge they have learned from the university match businesses' expectations for real work. The review of SLT and related studies lies in its ability to provide insights into exploring how the OJT program affects students' future career paths and self-development. Through the literature, the authors of this paper find that social learning can allow students to develop their profession, professional competencies and skills, personal enrichment, and personal capabilities.

The impacts of the OJT program on students' social learning

Professional development

As students enter into their professional stage, they have to cope with a number of challenges. It has been suggested that internships give students pathways for their improved professional skills (Kapoor & Gardner,

2019). The study by Sutrisno and Lubis (2022) similarly showed that online practicums can allow knowledge absorption to happen smoothly when social distancing caused by preventive measures against the Covid-19 pandemic were deployed. Internships may provide students with opportunities to reconsider the career they have chosen before (Nghia & Duyen, 2018). Also, it is indicated that such programs can help learners understand the world of work and identify an acceptable career path.

Besides, the program places great emphasis on professionalism which is not a natural quality, but a product of experiencing, learning, and observing surrounding things (Nguyen & Thach, 2022). The most valuable lesson that students learn while joining internships is activeness. Proactively getting to know people, actively exploring work at internships, proposing, and working with everyone, all help students integrate more quickly in a new environment. Activeness helps students not only to master the work they do but also to recognize their own problems to avoid negative things that frequently occur at work. Furthermore, an issue that many students need to address is being punctual since punctuality is considered one of the most crucial principles at workplaces, which requires workers, especially trainees not to be late for work. Working as employees, students are required to follow strict regulations of the companies or organizations. Therefore, the program has been suggested to be a great opportunity for students to learn how to adjust themselves in terms of punctuality and responsibility.

Moreover, regarding professional skills, students realize that internships provide them with business contacts, better knowledge of the job market, and greater job satisfaction (Gault et al., 2000a). Students can gain practical experiences through the working process. They will experience the operating processes of firms or organizations to better understand the corporate protocols, as well as accumulate more personal experience for themselves. At school, students are taught a great deal of knowledge about their major, but when working in businesses, students will be exposed to the guidance of experienced staff or mentors. They can gain ample practical knowledge and hone new skills that they cannot learn from books and teachers. These core values will become solid luggage for their future journey.

More importantly, students can get involved in a lot of work, tasks, or even projects during the OJT program. This may cause them to face certain problems as well as work pressure. However, once they overcome such challenges, they will be able to learn how to cope with the pressure and have a better mentality to solve problems more effectively. This plays an important role in boosting students' professional development for their future careers.

Professional skills

Novotorov (2001) stated that students value the experience they have from participating in internships since these programs are designed to help students evolve their professional skills that are congruent with changing practices of the workplace. Through their work process, students can not only improve their practical professional skills but also have workplace environment feelings. In addition, honing professional skills is also one of the foundations of any given career and is a prerequisite for the continuous survival and growth of any profession (Ebiye et al., 2015). Internship programs help students improve their communication and

interpersonal skills. In their workplace, students can meet many kinds of people daily and need to communicate with colleagues more regularly. As a result, students have a chance to connect and participate in shared activities, assist each other, exchange knowledge, and create relationships that allow them to learn from each other (Nguyen & Thach, 2022).

Also, learning workplace conduct is an integral part of the OJT program. Students learn how to expand relationships to facilitate daily communication as well as an exchange about work, which results in their improved skills by working with others as a team. Moreover, once assigned group work or team projects, students will improve the spirit of cooperation as well as the ability to unite with everyone around them. Because of that, students are more likely to dedicate themselves to the work first. Even if negative things happen, every individual will show professionalism by focusing on a common goal to accomplish their tasks brilliantly. One of the other important professional skills is computer skills. In most businesses, students are about to spend most of their time working with computers and even can experience the high technology of these working environments. In some companies and organizations, students can approach new working systems or software uniquely employed in their work, fostering their performance and computer skills, which is essential in the 4.0 era.

As students work in firms, they can integrate themselves by participating in many internal meetings. By joining meetings and training sessions, students improve critical thinking skills and learn decision-making and problem-solving skills from other employees. From there, students will be able to gain more confidence and a clearer view of procedures for dealing with arising problems and tasks. Consequently, they will know how to adjust themselves as well as their work so that they can become a better version of themselves.

Personality

The hands-on experience in complex real-world contexts provided by internships is becoming an integral part of the curricula and syllabus in many undergraduate and graduate degree programs, and this connection between academia and the world of work has been greatly appreciated not only by employers, but also by students who have reaped many benefits of this unique opportunity, including the enhancement of their academic, professional, and personal development (Calvo, 2011). Thereby, intense experiences and stress, especially if accompanied by reflection and emotional support during the internship, may promote greater self-awareness and result in personal development. Regarding the benefits of internships, Mihail (2006) indicated that internships help students advance the critical core skills demanded by international contexts such as communication, time management, self-reflection, self-confidence, and self-motivation, and identify their professional skills perspectives while they are still in university. Students not only learn further practical views on the subject, but they also improve their overall academic performance in real-world situations.

Barrick and Mount (1991) addressed the five personality traits namely extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience that students can form by taking part in the OJT

program and other internships. Through exploring this aspect, the researcher perceived the effectiveness of internships in helping students to acquire and improve their personal development. These personality traits are formed only when students experienced the OJT program. These are the experiences that students have been honing, learning, and interacting with many strangers in a completely new environment during their OJT period.

Personal capabilities

The OJT program helps students develop their personal capabilities that students have learned theory in class and activates the possibilities of jobs of which students are not aware themselves. It may be students' first introduction to the professional world and no matter how limited their expertise and professional skills are, this program is an opportunity to develop themselves even further. Nguyen and Thach (2022) argued that capability is an integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities, and understanding used appropriately and effectively - not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response to new and changing circumstances.

It is suggested that participating in an OJT program results in improved personal capabilities and interpersonal skills, such as professionalism, cultural sensitivity, time management, and integrity, that are not generally part of the formal tertiary education curriculum (Shoenfelt et al., 2013). The program creates satisfying experiences that motivate students to continue to follow their career path and have realistic expectations about the world of work and help clarify students' career intentions. Furthermore, the opportunity to acquire capabilities and experience through the program reinforces self-efficacy, developed self-understanding, self-discipline, maturity, and confidence. These competencies can help students create their learning goals from the program that will serve their profession well after graduation.

Communication skills are essential for people in the workplace on a daily basis. According to Khambayat (2017), there is overwhelming evidence that proficiency in communication skills can make any individual more versatile and more competitive in the workplace. Employees need to communicate well with others to transfer their messages, thoughts, feelings, thinking, and ideas so that their work can be done. Thus, as trainees, students need to improve their communication skills to be efficient workers in the future. Moreover, through the OJT period, students can greatly improve their interpersonal skills (Nguyen & Thach, 2022). It is obvious that students need this skill every day when they communicate and interact with other people in their office, both individually and in groups. In a personal setting, it refers to an individual's ability to build a relationship with others. Guirdham (2002) regarded interpersonal communication skills as essential interpersonal skills that realize effective interpersonal relationships and interactive behavior. Chatting with people at work will enable students to perceive when to speak and when to listen so that they can adjust their way of interacting with others.

Furthermore, another essential aspect is that students will be able to hone problem-solving skills by participating in the program. Problem-solving is generally regarded as the most important cognitive activity in everyday and professional contexts. Most people are required to and rewarded for solving problems. However, learning how

to solve problems is a rare requirement in formal educational settings because students' understanding of its processes is somehow limited (Jonassen, 2000). Therefore, the OJT program is an ideal environment to enable students to get closer to real workplaces where students frequently encounter problems that need proper solutions.

Lastly, the OJT program is more likely to boost students' teamwork skills. Teamwork is an essential part of workplace success as teamwork relies upon individuals working together in a cooperative environment to achieve common team goals through sharing knowledge, skills, and experience. Harris et al., (1996) explained that a team has a common goal or purpose where team members can develop effective, mutual relationships to achieve team goals. Teamwork is an indispensable skill for students to help them learn experiences from real work environments. It also involves building a number of important characteristics such as working cooperatively, contributing to the group with ideas, suggestions, and effort, a sense of responsibility, and especially respect for the various opinions, customs, and individual preferences. As aforementioned, teamwork skills are an essential skill not only applicable in the classroom but also useful for students' professions.

Participants

150 students were invited to participate in this study. They were studying at many different faculties at a private university, including English language, Japanese Language, Business Administration, Software Engineering, and Graphics Design. They had already completed their OJT programs in various businesses in their 6th semester after they had finished the compulsory subjects in their majors and attained certain necessary skills namely working-in-group, resume writing, problem-solving, computing, and other office skills. The 150 students first completed the questionnaires, and then 15 out of them were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews.

Research instruments

This study employed 2 instruments: a 4-item questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were obtained through the participants' answers to the questionnaire. The items were adapted from the questionnaire of Anjum's (2020) study to be suitable for the context of the current study. The questionnaire consisted of 34 items clustered into six parts: demographic information, reasons for the OJT participation, career development, professional skills, personal development, and personal capabilities. Following a 5-Likert-scale design, the questionnaire was first translated into Vietnamese before it was sent to the participants since not all of them were English major students. Being piloted with 40 samples for its reliability, the questionnaire was checked by using SPSS to calculate its Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The value of Cronbach's coefficient alpha of the piloted questionnaire is 0.854 (See Table 1). After this piloting stage, the questionnaire was officially employed to gather the quantitative data as Cronbach's coefficient alpha is above 0.7, and the questionnaire is reliable (Bland & Altman, 1997).

Table 1: Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.854	24

To obtain the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 randomly-chosen participants who had completed the questionnaires. All the questions for the interviews were first made in English version, which was then translated into Vietnamese once the researchers interviewed the participants. Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and subsequently translated into English. All the participants were also informed that their information was used for research purposes only and kept confidential.

Results from the questionnaires

Table 2 shows the central tendencies of the responses for all the items of Part III of the questionnaire by 150 participants of the study. The highest mean for professional development (PD) is 3.72 and the highest standard deviation (SD) is 1.283. However, the lowest mean and lowest standard deviation (SD) for professional development (PD) are 3.23 and 0.854, respectively. The range of mean 3.23–3.72 shows positive responses from the participants for all the items of professional development (PD).

Table 2: Measurement of Central Tendencies on Professional Development

Variables	Items	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Professional Development (PD)	PD1	3.68	0.854
	PD2	3.33	1.230
	PD3	3.23	1.283
	PD4	3.61	1.153
	PD5	3.54	1.232
	PD6	3.72	1.169

It can be seen from Table 3 that the highest mean for professional skills (PS) is 3.96. Meanwhile, the lowest mean for professional skills (PS) is 3.33. The range of mean 3.33-3.96 shows the participants have good responses for the items of professional skills (PS). In addition, the highest standard deviation (SD) for professional skills (PS) is 1.329, and the lowest standard deviation (SD) for professional skills (PS) is 0.901.

Table 3: Measurement of Central Tendencies on Professional Skills

Variables	Items	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Professional Skills (PS)	PS1	3.90	1.038
	PS2	3.85	0.901
	PS3	3.38	1.216
	PS4	3.33	1.088
	PS5	3.96	1.174
	PS6	3.42	1.329

The results of Table 4 indicate that 150 participants of this research showed their responses to the OJT's impact on their personal growth from "neutral" to "agree" for the items surveyed. The results show the highest mean and highest standard deviation (SD) for personal growth are 3.84 and 1.335, respectively. Meanwhile, the lowest mean in a total of personal growth (PG) is 3.13, indicating that the numbers tend to increase unevenly between questions in the questionnaire on problems related to personal growth (PG), but the standard deviation (SD) was the highest of all, at 1.335.

Table 4: Measurement of Central Tendencies on Personal Development

Variables	Items	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Personal growth (PG)	PG1	3.84	0.878
	PG2	3.53	1.283
	PG3	3.28	1.079
	PG4	3.70	1.205
	PG5	3.13	1.335
	PG6	3.74	1.064

Table 5 shows that the mean range from 3.96 to 4.20 implies positive responses from the participants for all the items of personal capabilities (PC). On the other hand, the lowest standard deviations (SDs) are 0.934 and 1.049, respectively. Comparing the two results, it can be seen that the mean from 3.45 to 3.65 was the lowest in personal capabilities (PC) items, it is more likely that participants have "neutral" thoughts on what they had experienced from the OJT program. Meanwhile, the mean range from 4.09 to 4.16 shows positive responses from the students for all the items of personal capabilities (PC).

Table 5: Measurement of Central Tendencies on Personal Capabilities

Variables	Items	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Personal capabilities (PC)	PC1	3.96	1.049
	PC2	4.20	0.960
	PC3	3.45	1.242
	PC4	3.65	1.069
	PC5	4.09	1.081
	PC6	4.16	0.934

Results from the interviews

In terms of professional development, a majority of the interviewees responded that the OJT program helped them have a clear orientation for their professional skills. Reversely, only one interviewee emphasized that the OJT programs had no impact on their career orientation. This interviewee once shared that:

"Although I did not work in the area that I set out before, I learned a lot to adapt to the working environment and did not want to change my job at all."

Regarding professional skills, there were 14 out of the 15 interviewees shared that after the OJT program, they improved professional skills such as office skills, teamwork skills, and time management skills. However, there

was an opposite opinion from an interviewee as follows:

"I feel that I have not developed much in professional skills. When I joined the OJT, I only learned simple skills such as printing skills, document scanning, and how to prepare procedures and files arrangement. These office skills I had not learned before."

Students also showed feedback on the impacts of the OJT program on their personal development. Particularly, once asked about their changes after the OJT, most students responded that their personal development did not change significantly. However, nearly one-third of the interviewees said that the OJT program helped them change their personal development in a positive way. Student A said:

"The OJT program forged professionalism in my expertise. There was a change related to my major as my vocabulary became wider. Moreover, I find out my own shortcomings, and proactively improve my strengths."

Similarly, student B emphasized that:

"I think my professional and personal development has evolved a lot because I did many different translation documents so that I changed positively in using grammar and vocabulary."

Furthermore, a few students felt that in addition to personal development changes, they experienced some changes in career goals as they decided whether the position they took after joining the OJT program would be suitable for them or not. One student in this group expressed:

"There was a change in my previous career goals. I learned skills that I have never experienced. This has significantly contributed to my personal development."

Meanwhile, another student responded:

"After completing the OJT, I realized that I wasn't suitable for the receptionist position. I think my future job will not be related to the service industry in general and the receptionist in particular."

It is worth mentioning the impacts of the program on students' personal capabilities. Information from the interviews has contributed to deeply understanding students' thoughts on this issue. More specifically, a great number of students personally showed their perspectives on the progress of joining the OJT regarding their improved personal abilities. There is a likelihood that students who participated in this program tended to change and develop positively in their personal capabilities of creating relationships with the people they worked with. One participant stated his opinion:

"I had more social relationships and I also learned a lot from colleagues who are older than me. Joining the OJT helped me to form a habit of punctuality and reasonable work arrangement."

More importantly, the OJT program not only offers students chances to develop their strengths in personal capabilities but also assists them in forming good habits about skills related to it. Two-thirds of the 15 participants interviewed said that after joining the OJT, they learned to manage their time properly and improved their social relationships. One participant said:

"Disciplinary habits like always being on time and completing assigned tasks are two skills that greatly

affect my personal capabilities during the OJT period. More importantly, I also have more social relationships.”

As a result, one-third of the participants said that in addition to developing skills related to personal capabilities, it also helped them to have respect for others, to listen, and gain input from colleagues. Moreover, the students learned to forge themselves to be responsible at work. One participant expressed:

“My personal capabilities have changed remarkably, I am self-aware of the conscientiousness and responsibility for the job.”

A number of different perspectives on the benefits of the OJT program were expressed in the interviews. First, the OJT program shows its superiority in offering a wide range of firms for students. A student responded to the question about the difference between the OJT program and other internship programs in other universities as follows:

“As far as I am concerned, students from other universities have to find companies by themselves, while at FPT students are given a list of suggested companies for them to choose from.”

Flexibility is regarded as a major advantage. The program allows students to commence the OJT course at the end of their 6th semester or at the end of their 3rd year so that they can have enough time to reflect on their on-campus studies and enhance their skills. Talking about this advantage, Student D reported:

“This university lets students participate in the OJT program in their third year, and it helps to create opportunities for them to review their professional skills and know what they need to develop further in the future.”

Furthermore, a number of students were satisfied with the length of the OJT program. One participant expressed that:

“The OJT course at this university is about 2.5-4 months, which is long enough for students to experience the practical work compared with other universities in the region where their internship courses last only 1-2 weeks.”

The working environment in the OJT program is fairly professional. A number of opportunities were offered to students in order to access practical experience. It is proved by the answer of one of the respondents as follows:

“I find the OJT quite good because students are practically exposed to businesses and attain experience when working in such authentic working circumstances.”

Although the OJT program brings the benefits of improving students' knowledge and skills, it has certain limitations in terms of lack of job positions, inadequate organizational structure, and job field limitations. First of all, the respondents identified a variety of industrial fields that are taken into consideration. One interviewee said:

“I find the OJT quite good because students are practically exposed to businesses and able to learn experience when dealing with tasks assigned at businesses. However, I have some suggestions that there should be more areas for students to select.”

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings pointed out that the job positions inadequately meet students' expectations. Therefore, they are not assigned to participate in projects or a specific position while being trainees. For such a circumstance, one of the participants reported:

My supervisors in the company assigned small jobs like data searching, so I could not learn much from the program".

In addition, another interviewee emphasized:

"I feel that I have not developed much in professional skills. When I joined the OJT, I only learned simple skills such as printing skills, document scanning, and how to prepare procedures and file arrangement."

Some issues were identified concerning the relationship between the university and the companies, leading to the difficulty in arranging the job positions for students. One of the respondents once commented:

"The preparing process of the OJT program is unorganized. If firms arrange particular positions for students by themselves, it will probably lead to a mismatch between the position characteristics and the student's aspirations."

The students emphasized that they had to join a firm that did not relate to their major. This could be the reason why they reported that they did not develop their skills as much as expected during the program. Student E said:

"There is a shortage of human resources in the Relations Affairs of the university. In the end, due to lack of time, students were sent to businesses that were not on the firms' recommendation list."

Discussion

Regarding the reasons for participating in the OJT program, most of the students felt interested to participate in such a program and reported that even if it is not required in the school's curriculum, they still wish to experience it once. Marks and rewards are considered inspirational aspects of the program; however, they are not the most important factors affecting students' decisions on whether or not they want to work in businesses as interns. Although students have various reasons for taking part in this program, all of them perceived OJT as one of the significant reasons to study at this university.

Surprisingly, a comparison of the quantitative and qualitative findings reveals the opposite opinions concerning the expected achievements before attending the program. Participants mostly expressed that they were of great concern of their academic credits whilst their responses in the interview indicated that the OJT was the best opportunity to practice and apply their learned knowledge and theories in a real working environment. Nevertheless, in the interviews where respondents have more time to think carefully about all the reasons, they all agreed that the biggest one for joining the program refers to the benefits it brings to students' permanent jobs. It is indicated that the OJT program offered students a good chance to practice what they have learned at the university. None of the participants expressed that assessment from the mentors in terms of giving scores was their apprehension of its impacts on their academic results at school. Therefore, it can be concluded that they

preferred immersing themselves in what they have experienced as a trainee to attaining high scores given by the trainers.

The results of this study were consistent with those of previous studies that the students' top priority in choosing an internship program is an environment to practice theoretical knowledge (Anjum, 2020). In terms of the impacts of the OJT program on students' current and future employment, most participants believed that the OJT program helped increase their chances of advancement and promotion in their future jobs rather than the present training. It is indicated that the program will be a good opportunity for students to equip themselves with better professional skills for their future occupations.

Moreover, different from the studies by Anjum (2020) and Nguyen and Thach (2022), it is remarkable in this study that awards from businesses are extremely significant to inspire students during the OJT time even though receiving the awards is not their ultimate goal. Conversely, most students wish to work in a company where they could receive rewards after an outstanding performance as they appreciated the company and the motivation to overcome the difficulties encountered at work. Meanwhile, only half of the respondents reported that they received awards from firms they worked for during the OJT course. Only a few companies have awards for trainees in the OJT program, which might deprive their great satisfaction of their expectations. Therefore, it can be suggested that this result has not previously been described in other related studies. More importantly, it is emphasized that the awarding policy and other forms of appraisal should be taken into great consideration as an integral part of encouraging students to work more effectively while giving awards is believed to be necessary for most businesses in the context where workers' devotion and the quality of work are addressed to be the priorities.

The findings are in line with those of the study of Anjum (2020) as the OJT program has positive impacts on students' career development and personal growth. It is indicated that most students experiencing the program have improved their professional skills, which is also consistent with the results of the study of Novotorov (2001) that by joining the training team, students learned how to work professionally as it is considered a prerequisite for graduates to be employed. More importantly, students could apply what they have learned from the university, resulting in their reinforced concepts and knowledge. Furthermore, besides gaining more practical work experience, students could realize what job duties interest them most so that they can learn how to adjust their learning styles and goals when they return to the university for the remaining subjects. From the qualitative results, it is asserted that after entering the OJT program, students have a clearer orientation for their future careers, which is the ultimate goal of achieving a degree. Also, the results of the study are more likely to support the perspective of Gault et al. (2020) that the internship is a bridge to help students narrow the gap between career expectations established in the classroom and the actual working environment. It can be concluded that the findings of the current study significantly contribute to confirming that albeit its drawbacks, the OJT program has very positive impacts on students' professional development and future career paths.

Conclusion

This research aims to evaluate the impacts of the OJT program on students' professional skills and personal development of students at FPT University. There are two research questions investigated in the research in which the population comprised 150 undergraduates from different majors. It is apparent that the OJT program has a positive impact on the students' professional skills and personal development of students at FPT University, greatly affecting their personal development, skills, and capabilities. As students' professional skills and personal development are improved, they can gain confidence and become well-organized with the skills they have learned after joining the program. Thereby, students will have good preparations of expertise as well as professional skills to avoid being bewildered by the real-work world in the future.

Furthermore, there is a difference in terms of exploring students' positive changes in both personal development and personal capabilities from the results of quantitative data and qualitative data. More importantly, students acknowledged that the OJT program helps them develop their strengths in personal development and enables them to form good habits and essential skills related to personal capabilities. In the same vein, it is suggested that the OJT program has a considerable influence on students' professional skills goals, improving personal development and forming professional skills.

Recommendations

Future research can be conducted by gathering personal students' opinions to analyze the impact of the OJT program on intrinsic motivation and student career choice. Furthermore, future studies can also be carried out in other areas to gain deep insights into the OJT program and other internship modules.

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